

Athenian News:

O R,

Dunton's Oracle.

From Saturday July the 22d, to Tuesday July the 24th, 1710.

The Aged-Post, or Dunton's Correspondence (by way of Letter) with his Spiritual Guide, upon such Nice, Secret and uncommon Cases (concealing the Person) as have occur'd to his Reverend Friend, in a Life of near Fourscore Years.

THIS Correspondence with my *Aged-Post* or (*Spiritual Guide*) I call him so for his Great Years, eminent Piety and Generous Friendship are Letters that really pass between my self and a *Learned Divine of the Church of England*, who as he hath fill'd two Pulpits near Fifty Years, can't be far from his 80th Year: That the Letters are Real, my worthy Friend Mr. Wiltham Lutwich can testify, who received 'em by the *General-Post*, and deliver'd 'em to me with his own Hand, but who this *Spiritual Guide* is, is a great Secret, for he'd lie conceal'd under the name of *Fido*. However, that those *Nice, Secret, and uncommon Cases* that he sends to *Dunton's Oracle* (concealing the Person) may make the deeper Impression upon the Minds of such as read them: I'll here draw his Character, which take as follows.

' *FIDO* (my *Spiritual Guide*) has many Generous and Noble Dispositions, but no one appears more Illustrious and visible in him than Moderation to such as dissent from him, and Zeal for his Master's Service, and the good of Souls, what a Rare and excellent Quality is a Publick Spirit for God? How little is it in the Power of the Greatest Men to frown him out of Duty, or to flatter him into Sin; He tells me in his first and second Letter, that he has supply'd two Country Pulpits without a Curate near 50 Years, what a Masculine Cou-

rage has he with a fixt Resolution not to displease God to please Men, but notwithstanding his *Ardent Zeal* for God, yet is he of a very Peaceable and quiet Spirit, he does not *Salamander-like* delight to live in the Fire of Contention, but (as moderate Men usually are) is of a uniting healing Spirit: He is very serious, truly humble, and extraordinary Charitable: His great Moderation to such as differ from him (in Things Indifferent) makes his Character shine: He has a Catholick universal Charity and Love for all, and tho' he hates the Vices of wicked Men, yet he loves their Persons, but he has a Particular Affection for all Saints, and that as Saints, making their *Graces*, not their *Opinions* the measure of his Love: His Spirit and Principles are so Peaceable, as that he desires to avoid all needless disputes that might breed Strife; but when he is call'd to dispute, or confer with those of different Judgments, he evidences much Modesty and Meekness, arguing not for Glory and Victory, but to inquire into Truth, wherein he affirms nothing, but what he endeavours to prove out of the Scriptures, and when he cannot fully comply with other Men's Perswasions, yet he will not impose his own on them, as the Rule of their Faith or Communion.

This is the true Character of *FIDO*, that *Aged Post* or *Spiritual Guide*, that I consult in all *Nice and Secret Cases*, and who will impart to me (by way of Letter) whatever *Uncommon Matters* have occur'd to him in a Life of near Fourscore Years, and if our Correspondence continues, 'twill in a few Years make *Dunton's Oracle*, A Directory for Tender Consciences in Living Instances, a Work never attempted before (except by Bishop Sanderson, Barlow and Hall) and for that Reason will

will want no other Recommendation, then telling the World 'twas written by *the Learned Fido*: So that my *Aged Post* is likely to prove the most useful, as well as the most entertaining Part of my *Athenian News*, for there are many Consciences truly scrupulous, that can't unbosom themselves to a *Minister or Christian Friend*, and upon that score they carry their Wounds within 'em, and there's none to Administer Relief because their *Cases* are unknown; It is with the most tender Regard Imaginable to such Persons that these *Secret Cases* (whilst the Persons lye conceal'd) are now Publish'd in hopes that those who can't discover their *Case* to a Minister, may here see it resolv'd in the *Instance of another Person*, that Labours under the same Grievance with themselves; and if the endeavours of this *Spiritual Guide* prove but useful either to the easing or directing any Man's Conscience, I'm perswaded he won't grow weary of sending Weekly to *Dunton's Oracle* a Pacquet of Nice Cases.

But without any more *Preface*, I shall now open the Pacquet of *Fido's Letters*, and the first shews.

If the Church of England be in Danger, who are the False Brethren, and was this following, viz.

Mr. Dunton,

I Wish I dwelt nearer you, that I might be so happy to enjoy the Conversation of a Man, whose Pen entertains me so often with such Pleasure. Your two Books Intituled, *The Christians Gazet*, and *The Hazard of a Death-Bed Repentance*, I have read with very great satisfaction and delight, but 'tis not convenient to express my Thoughts, unless I knew a way to write, that might be read only thro' your Spectacles; I am a very old Man, yet I have heat enough to animate me for your Service, and tho' my Candle burns dim being so near the Socket, yet I thank God, it yet serves to light me in two mean Country Pulpits, which I have (alone) fil'd every Sunday near Fifty Years, so it affords me still some light to discern how some are fil'd by others. I am griev'd to see the Productions of some Men's Passions vented in those sacred Places, where all shou'd be calm and Pacifick, like that good Spirit which dwells only in the humble and Charitable, and was amaz'd when I read Dr. Sacheverell's Sermon, which hath made so great a Noise, and kindled so great a Fire, I pray God it may by a Prudent Care be soon extinguish'd, otherwise it may give our greatest Enemies (which wait for't) an opportunity to

consume us. *If our Church be in danger*, it is from such False Brethren that will not suffer the Coles to lye quiet under the Ashes, but will (first in the Pulpit, and then in a Factionous Country Progress) open, expose and blow them up till they themselves, as well as those they hate are buried in one common Ruin: I have a Discourse which I wou'd have Printed immediately, which I wou'd send to you suited to the Present Circumstances, to allay Men's Fears and Passions, which may be useful at this Juncture. In this Discourse (and upon all other occasions) I Industriously avoid Personal Reflections and Reproach, thinking it sufficient to expose Vice, without bearing hard on the Memory of those that have been guilty thereof, which usually defeats the end of Admonition and Reproof. Admonitions ought to be manag'd in a Prudent and wary Manner, by keeping up a Respect that is owing to Peoples Quality, and which I wish you had observ'd more in your (otherwise) most excellent Essay intituled, *The Hazard of a Death-Bed Repentance*; for then I believe it wou'd have been more serviceable especially to Persons of Quality, for whose use it was chiefly design'd, for 't'as ever been my Opinion our Zeal against Vice ought not to transport us to what is Indecent, and besides the Merits of the cause, 'tis true, (Mr. Dunton) in answer to this you tell me, 'That you shall ever think it a Virtue to call a Spade a Spade, and therefore (say you) I think to have said more of the Leud D—had been allowable—But if you are sincere, when you tell me you submit that Book and all your Writings to my Censure, and (as you call it) much better Judgment, I must then plainly tell you, no Proverb ought to extinguish our Charity, or render our Zeal too sharp and Pungent. Considering we all are subject to Sin and Frailty in one kind or other, and therefore ought to treat our Fellow Offenders with Pity and Compassion, in our endeavours to pull them out of the Fire, and Reduce them into the Right way.

I do highly approve of your *Weekly Oracle*, and Great Zeal in exposing the Vices of the Age, and particularly that of Impurity, and want of Charity, to such as Dissent from the Church of England, but Zeal is a dangerous Weapon, if not weilded by a Prudent and Charitable Hand (of which we have a notorius Instance in Dr. Sacheverell's Sermon and Country Progress) and this I speak that both of us may endeavour to render our Attempts this way more serviceable to the Publick, and yield more satisfaction to our own Minds, in keeping close to the Rules of Christian Prudence, as well as Innocence, Moderation

deration being a *Virtue*, which I dare not run down, as too many do considering 'tis recommended to us by an Apostolical Injunction and Command: I am very much,

Your Friend and Servant

July 10. 1710.

FIDO.

Dunton's Answer to to the Foregoing Letter.

Reverend Sir,

I Received your obliging Letter, wherein your Humility and Friendship seem to out-vie each other, and which is Predominant is not easy to determine, yet I must crave the Freedom to tell you, that as to those great Encomiums you bestow upon *Dunton's Oracle*, I conceive you rather thereby instruct me *what I shou'd be, than tell me what I am*; But tho' (Reverend Sir) you shew your Friendship in condescending to speak so well of so mean an Author, yet by that time my *Weekly Oracle* (or 3000 Posts) are all Publish'd I hope, 'twill be no Ostentation to say the *Great Variety of Subjects* contain'd in it, (however meanly perform'd) will present the World with a *Universal Entertainment*, which wou'd be much Improv'd, had I the Happiness to live near you, for I ever thought your Conversation a *Taste of Heaven*, and cou'd I enjoy so great a Blessing wou'd never (under any difficulty) consult any Oracle but your Learn'd self, but tho' by reason of your distance from *London*, this is a Happiness I can never expect, however my Fancy often turns *Forester*, and walks the round till I meet with you, and my Ingenious Friend Dr. *Bullivant* your next Neighbour, when I am infinitely transported with that, but Imaginary Injoyment of two Persons I so much delight in, and whose Conversation is so great a Blessing to all that have it, the Conceit of which has driven me into a serious consideration, and search after the wonderfull force of the *Imagination*; And I find some have been kill'd, others preserv'd meerly by the strength of their Imagination: Here cou'd I be tediously copious in as *Faceticious*, as strange Stories to this purpose; but I will not with *Phormio* read a Lecture to *Hannibal*: It shall suffice me to hope, that such *Images of the Brain* are no breach of the second Commandment, or if they are, I desire you wou'd let me know it, for your *Great Age and Learning*, as well as Generous Friendship fits you for a *Spiritual Guide*, and I never desire to have a better, or any other did I live near you, for tho' I differ from you as to the Blunt way of Reproving Vice, yet your Modera-

tion I greatly admire, and am wholly of your Mind as to the great mischief done in the Kingdom by Dr. *Sacheverell's Furious Sermon*, and *Mob Progress*, I own indeed, *Zeal is a Composition of all the Passions, the Affections warmed and heated into a lively Vigour and Activeness*; and this is so far from being a Fault, that if it be made Regular with Prudence and a Christian Discretion, 'tis good and commendable always in a good Matter: And certainly if ever it be seasonable for us to kindle a Fire upon the Altar, 'tis so when we are about to do Sacrifice to God Almighty, but (as you well observe) Our Zeal against Vice, ought not to transport us to what is Indecent, and besides the Merits of the Cause (I have prov'd this Assertion true, in my Answer to Dr. *Sacheverell's Sermon*, intituled, *The Bull-Baiting*) and shall ever be of your Opinion, that no Divine shou'd vent his Passions in such a sacred Place as a Pulpit, where all shou'd be calm and Pacifick; and therefore (to make use of your own Words) Dr. *Sacheverell* has kindled a Jacobite Fire, and made a great Noise about nothing, for to what purpose (if I may presume to use her Majesties Words). 'Does he revive Questions and Disputes of a very high Nature, and which must be with an ill Intention, since they can only tend to foment, but not to heal our Divisions and Animosities, if his design by such Sermons, (and Country Rambles) wan't to make way for the Pretender (who some of his Party have the Impudence already to call Hereditary) but let Dr. *Sacheverell* rail as much as he please against Protestant Dissenters, and Men of your Great Moderation, under the odious Names of Trimmers and Low Churchmen I shall never be fond of the Names which distinguish one Party from another in the Church. I esteem not a Man the better for being regimented in this Communion rather than in that, and for ought I know in the Camp of God a *Reformed* may be as acceptable as in those of Men. However a *Mutineer* in either is odious, and to raise *Factions about Religion* is to adore *Mars* instead of *Christ*, and to commence a War for the sake of Peace. I cannot approve of their bitter Zeal, who if they cannot call down Fire from Heaven, will kindle it on the Earth, against all that think not as they do. He is an ill disputant for Christianity, who uses no other Topicks than Gun Powder, and Steel the Logick of *Mahomet*, becomes not a Disciple of *Jesus*, and I shou'd make but an Hippocritical Convert, were I to be Dragoon'd into Religion by the Domineering Arguments of such booted Apostles, as Dr. *Sachell* and Mr. *Hig—ns*.

You

You tell me (*Reverend Sir*) that you have fill'd two Country Pulpits every Sunday for near Fifty Years, and I know you are a thorough Conformist to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England, but as you are not for *Persecuting such as Dissent from you*, you must expect that the High-Flyers will be giving you odious Names, if they stop there, for the Jacobite Crew stick at nothing (tho' ne're so Bloody or Cruel) to advance the Interest of *Young Perkin*, such a small Author, as I no sooner answer'd Dr. Sach—rell's Furious Sermon, but his *Mob-Friends* threatn'd to pull me into a thousand Pieces, tho' (like your self) I ever was a true Son of the Church of England, and resolve to live and dye in that Communion, but 'tis enough with the *Jacks* to prove a Man a *Phanatick*, or Low-Churchman, if he won't damn all such as dissent from the Church of England, but (by the leave of such False Brethren) 'twill ever be my Opinion, that to perswade to Conformity by Prisons and Railing Language, is something like demonstrating a Proposition in *Euclid*, or Apologizing by a Beedle and Wedges, and I conceive they will equally produce their Effects; when any Mathematician shall do the one, Dr. Sacheverell may perform the other. We find few Dissenters edified by burning their Pulpits, or instructed by the spoiling of their Goods, Force hath as little Power on Souls as a Chirurgions Knife on the Understanding, and Affections of Men. Remedies must have some Analogy with the Sick, and their Diseases; 'Tis sound Reason (which is of our Essence and Constitution) with some little intermixtures of Kindness and Love, that must make Men Proselytes to the Church of England, or nothing. Sir, 'tis this in conjunction (with your healing Sermon) must allay Men's Fears and Passions, and convince the World that the Church of England is in no danger. Such Moderation as this may truly be call'd a Virtue, and ought not (as you well observe) to be run down, considering 'tis recommended to us by an Apostolical Injunction; without this Moderation Zeal is (indeed) a dangerous Weapon, and there never was a more Pernicious Instance of it, then we find in Dr. Sach—rell's Sermon and Country Progress.

The use of this *Variety in Religions* is far different: Truth is *Homogeneous*, and attracts to it self all that is of its own Nature, wheresoever dispers'd or separated, rejecting the rest, as not pertaining to it. Thus I overlooking the Errors and Mistakes of these High-Flyers, and such as differ from me, at the same time embrace their *Orthodox Tenets*, and shuning their Vices I imitate their Vertues; This (*Reverend Sir*) is to follow your good Advice, who tell me no Proverb ought to extinguish Charity, or render our Zeal too sharp and Pungent, and that we shou'd keep close to the Rules of Christian Prudence, as well as Innocence; which I shall always endeavour to do as believing such *Christian Moderation* as this, is of the same Nature of the Sun who has commerce with many Pullutions, yet remains himself undefil'd: In my Travels I learn'd this Moderation, and he that knows not how to practice it, is not fit to stir out of his Chimny Corner, for as you well observe, the good Spirit dwells only in the humble and Charitable Man; and I might add in the Sincere and Impartial, for (*Sir*) I can't forbear to observe, that tho' you begin your Letter to me with a high *Encomium* upon two Books that I lately Publish'd, yet you conclude it with humbling me so far as to say, I have been too Severe (in my *Essay on a Death-Bed Repentance*) against the Sinners of Quality, in not giving that Respect that is due to them; Which I'm yet to be convinc'd of, as believing (in despite of the Proverb) that the Truth may always be spoken, and for that reason, as a Spade can be nothing else but a Spade, shou'd always be call'd by its Right Name.

These (*Reverend Sir*) are some of my hasty Remarks upon your *Healing Letter*, and if my *Spiritual Guide*, (I mean your self) does but approve of them, I shan't doubt of being in the Right way to Heaven, which (as my REVEREND FATHER wou'd often say) Lies between all Extreams, where living and dying you'll ever find,

Your very humble Servant,

London, July
20. 1710.

JOHN DUNTON.